
A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE VISITATION OF

THE HONOURABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

R I C H A R D

LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM.

MEMORANDUM

TO THE COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE

FROM THE SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE



FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE LAND ACT, 1909

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LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM,

HELD IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF

ST. MARY LE BOW IN DURHAM,

ON THURSDAY, JULY 27, 1758:

BY ROBERT LOWTH, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF DURHAM,

RECTOR OF SEDGFIELD,

AND CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

PUBLISHED AT HIS LORDSHIP'S REQUEST.

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MATT. vi. 10.

THY KINGDOM COME.

THE kingdom of God, or the kingdom of Heaven, according to its most usual and almost constant acceptation throughout the several histories of the Evangelists, signifies the state of the gospel, or the church of Christ upon earth, first begun and established by the preaching of our blessed Saviour and his apostles. When our Saviour commands his disciples to pray, that this kingdom may come, his meaning is, that we should make it a constant and perpetual subject of our petitions to Almighty God, that this gospel-state, or church of Christ, so begun and established upon earth, may, through his grace, be still advanced and carried on, till at length it arrive at that maturity and completion, that universality, unity, and spiritual perfection, which he hath decreed and promised that it shall one time attain.

Without troubling you any farther in supporting or enlarging upon this explication of the words, or in discoursing on the nature of the gospel-state considered as a kingdom, I shall endeavour to carry your thoughts to a general view of the past, the present, and the future condition of christianity in the world; in order to shew how

much reason the disciples of Christ ever had, and still have, to offer up this petition for its advancement: what we may be allowed to hope from God's gracious promises in this respect in time to come: how much it is the duty of every subject, and more especially of every minister of this heavenly kingdom, to aim at promoting, by his most earnest endeavours, as well as his prayers, the perfect and universal establishment of it.

Our Saviour commanding his disciples daily and perpetually to offer up their prayers to God for the advancement of his kingdom on earth, may well be understood by this very command to intimate to them, that the state of christianity should long be incomplete, its progress gradual, its advances towards perfection and universality, oftentimes slow and imperceptible, and that it would not arrive at its full maturity till the end of the age, till the last scene of this great dispensation. And this he has more fully explained to them in several of his discourses, particularly in some of his parables. 'The kingdom of Heaven is likened to a man which sowed good seed in his field, but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat; which appeared together with the wheat, and were suffered to grow together with it till the harvest.' And again, "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise, night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come."

^a MATT. xiii. 24, &c.

^b MARK iv. 26, &c.

Such is the prediction of our Saviour : the event hitherto will be found intirely conformable to it.

If we take a view of christianity in the first ages, we shall find it mightily increasing from very small beginnings ; spreading and extending itself far and wide with a quick progress ; and ‘ like leaven,’ as ‘ our Saviour very expressively represents it, ‘ hid in a large quantity ‘ of meal, working and fermenting by degrees, till the whole was ‘ leavened.’ We first hear that the number of the names of the disciples together, were about ‘ an hundred and twenty. Soon after ‘ in one day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. ‘ Next the number of them that heard the word, which Peter spoke to ‘ them, and believed, was about five thousand. And believers were ‘ still added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.’ At the same time they abounded in charity, in faith, and in good works : ‘ the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one ‘ soul : they continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship : ‘ they had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods, ‘ and parted them to all men, as every man had need.’ Such was the state of the church at its very first establishment, and as yet confined to Jerusalem : small in extent, and few in number ; but full of grace and of power, perfect in every good work, and rich in all the fruits of the spirit.

But no sooner had the persecution which arose about Stephen against the church at Jerusalem scattered abroad the disciples, than the gospel was, together with them, spread through all the regions round about. And in a few years, by the preaching of the apostles and teachers, and principally by the labours of the great apostle of the Gentiles, it was

^c MATT. xiii. 33.

^d ACTS i, ii, iv, v.

carried through almost all the parts, and even beyond the limits of the Roman empire; if we give credit to a tradition * that prevailed antiently in the church, it was established in Parthia, and even in India, by the apostle St. Thomas: so that considering the state of communication subsisting at that time between the several nations, it might truly be said, that "their sound had gone out through all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world." Thus was the seed of the word widely and abundantly sown even in the apostolical age: let us consider the increase and the produce of it.

The rapid progress and plentiful increase of christianity in the first age, in spite of all the opposition it had to struggle with from the prejudice of the world supported by all the power of it, in the midst of dangers, distresses, reproach, and persecution, has been deservedly considered as the immediate effect of a divine power co-operating with it, and as a more stupendous miracle in itself, than any of the several wonders by which it was promoted. By the accounts of the † heathens themselves, it appears, that as early as the time of Nero the christians at Rome were become very numerous: in the time of Trajan we find by the testimony of the ‡ governor of one of the provinces, that christianity had so far prevailed in those parts, that the temples of the gods were almost desolated, their sacred rites long intermitted, and that there were very few who would buy sacrifices. Justin Martyr ^h soon after informs us, that there was no nation in the known world, not even the most barbarous and uncivilized, where some did not offer up prayers and thanksgivings to God in the name of Jesus Christ. Ter-

* EUSEB. Hist. Eccl. III. 1. GREG. NAZ. Orat. xxv. † TACIT. Annal. xv. 44.

‡ PLIN. Lib. x. Epist. 97. A. D. CIV.

^h Dialog. cum Tryphone; part. 2. pag. 388. Edit. Thirlby. circa A. D. CL.

tullian[†] in the next age says, that every part of the empire, every place and station, was full of christians, and that they began to rival the heathens in numbers. Next to the especial providence of God, and the signs that gave witness to the first preachers of the gospel, christianity owed its success to the graces and virtues that shone forth in the lives of its professors. The sincerity and steadfastness of their faith, their courage and constancy in suffering the most cruel tortures in defence of it, was fully exhibited and approved to the world in numberless examples of all ages, sexes, and conditions. The advocates for christianity, who undertook to plead its cause before the rulers of the world, could in their apologies boldly appeal even to their enemies and persecutors, not only for the holiness and purity of its doctrines, but also for the sanctity and innocence of those that professed it; their blameless and inoffensive conversation, the simplicity and integrity of their manners, their piety to God, their union among themselves, and their peaceable and charitable disposition towards all mankind. This perhaps may pass for a just account of the state of the christian church under persecution for the three first centuries: continually increasing in numbers, and enlarged in extent; nor even in the end greatly fallen off from its original integrity, with regard either to sanctity of manners, or purity of faith.

But it must be allowed that from the very times of the apostles the church was troubled by heretics of various denominations, who from time to time attempted to introduce the most absurd doctrines and the most abominable practices. They appear to have been for the most part either hypocrites or enthusiasts of the grossest sort. Their usual method was to endeavour to corrupt and falsify the Holy Scrip-

[†] Apologet. xxxvii. & Advers. Judæos. vii. circa A. D. cc.

tures, so as to make them countenance their wild imaginations and ungodly doings. They seem to have had no sort of title to the name of christians which they took upon themselves. Accordingly St. Jude ^k speaks of them, as of "certain men that had crept in unawares; " ungodly men, that turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, " and denied the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." St. John ^l calls them Antichrists, and says of them, "they went out " from us, but they were not of us." Such in general were the heretics of the first ages: rejected of the church, and condemned of themselves; " who tho' they professed that they knew God, yet in " works denied him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every " good work reprobate." And such are the absurdities, blasphemies, and abominations of which these filthy dreamers are accused, that we might perhaps hardly give credit to the charge, tho' supported by the concurrent testimony of the writers of that age, were there not even at this time a ^m sect crept in unawares likewise among us, who have adopted and openly avowed them. Tho' these might dishonour the christian name by falsely taking it upon themselves; tho' the converts from Judaism at first were always endeavouring to adulterate the doctrine of Christ by grafting on it their own superstitions, and those of the Gentiles afterwards, by introducing into it their own impure philosophy, yet the church still acquitted herself of the charge committed to her, and kept entire the sacred deposit of " the faith " which was once delivered to the saints."

At length " the grain of mustard-seed, tho' the least of all seeds, " was grown and become a great tree, and the fowls of the air came " and lodged under the shadow of it." Constantine embraced the

^k Vers. 4. ^l 1 Epist. ii. 18, 19. ^m See "The Moravians compared and detected."

christian faith: he became the nursing father of the church; which now at rest from persecution, and set above her adversaries, increased mightily under the favour of her great protector, and was established in safety, prosperity and honour. It might now be expected, that “the mountain of the Lord’s house being established in the top of the mountains, all nations should flow unto it; and that all being gathered together under one head in Christ, they might be presented to God a glorious church holy and without blemish.” But alas! from this very æra of the security, prosperity, and splendor of the christian church, we must date the decay of the true spirit of christianity. It still continued indeed to increase for some time outwardly in extent and numbers; but daily suffered within a much greater loss, in the visible diminution of faith, holiness, humility, and charity. Honour, wealth, and power, soon excited pride, avarice, and ambition; and the contest for these worldly advantages was but too often carried on, and with the greater animosity, under pretence of contending for the faith. Christianity began now to be treated as a science or an art; and its doctrines to be opposed and defended with much acuteness of wit, and more keenness of passion: while the simplicity and purity of faith was perplexed and corrupted by the subtilty of debate, and charity quite lost in the vehemence of contention. A false, or at best an indiscreet, zeal stood ever upon the watch, ready to combat every idle speculation that happened to be advanced; thus giving occasion to perpetual debate, and generally improving every debate into an irreconcilable dissension. Many an absurd opinion, many an over-curious theory and bold decision in matters of doubtful disputation, that would otherwise have sunk in oblivion, and died with its author, gained strength and importance by opposition; till being dignified with the title of Herefy, and perpetuated by an Anathema, it was
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in a manner consecrated and delivered down as a never-failing subject of strife and division to posterity. Some indeed of the novelties then introduced were in themselves of greater consequence and more pernicious tendency, striking at the fundamentals of the christian faith: but even these perhaps, if they had been at first treated with more moderation, or at last condemned and pursued with less severity, might never have survived to divide the christian world for ages against itself. But the rage of debate, and opposition of science, falsely so called, seems to have been the epidemical distemper of those times; and the certain consequences of it were wrath, envy, hatred, strife, faction: and to the great disgrace of the christian name, while her own sufferings under the heathen powers were yet fresh in remembrance, persecution was adopted by the church, and began to be exercised by christians against christians. It had been in a former age a common observation of the heathens, " See how these christians love one another: See how these christians hate one another, was now the more just and obvious remark. A candid heathen historian ° speaks of it as a maxim of the emperor Julian founded on experience, That no wild beasts were so cruel and inveterate enemies to men, as most christians were to one another: and on this maxim that able and determined adversary of the gospel very judiciously projected the utter destruction of christianity. He sheathed the sword of heathen persecution, and fomented the spirit of discord already preying on the vitals of the christian church. Where so little regard was paid to the great commandment of brotherly love, it is not to be expected that the love of God should continue its perfect work. Let it suffice to observe, that piety began to be infected with superstition; that purity of life began to be estimated

° TERTULLIAN. Apologet. xxxix.

° AMMIAN. MARCELL. xxii. 5.

by an affected abstinence, and unbidden and extravagant austerities : saints and martyrs were regarded with a reverence, that by degrees approached to adoration, and at last ended in idolatry ; and those only were thought to serve God in perfection, who retired into desarts and cloisters, to become a torment to themselves, and useless to the world. Superstition, contention, and division still increased within ; and gave great advantages to Mohammedism, that assaulted christianity from without, and at length laid waste the eastern church. The western church was indeed on the other hand much enlarged by the accession of the northern nations, which had over-run that part of the Roman empire : but barbarism and ignorance was introduced with them, under whose influence every error, that had been before sown, was fostered and nourished, and new errors were from time to time propagated. The ambition of the church of Rome made use of every opportunity, which these dark ages afforded of completing her great scheme of spiritual tyranny and temporal dominion : every superstition, that served to help it forward, or support it, was made an article of faith : in a word, that deep system of worldly policy, founded in the corruption and perversion of all the great principles of the gospel ; that mystery of iniquity, properly enough called Popery, but which might more properly be called Antichristianism, was devised, improved, and brought to perfection.

To rescue christianity from this miserable state of depravation and oppression ; to restore it to its original purity, and to replace it on its true foundation ; to put an end to the insolent usurpation of human authority upon the rights of private judgment, of reason, and conscience, and upon the divine authority of the Holy Scriptures themselves ; this was the great design of the reformation. A fair prospect was now opened for the re-establishment of the kingdom of God in

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purity and truth, such as never had offered itself since the first ages of christianity. But the fulness of the time was not yet come: it pleased God in his unsearchable wisdom to suffer the progress of this great work to be stopped in the mid-way, and the effects of it to be greatly weakened by many unhappy divisions among the reformed. Yet hath it been, notwithstanding its imperfection, of most effectual service to the cause of true religion; and herein seems to be laid the foundation for executing the great plan of divine wisdom, for raising the superstructure of universal christianity. It has shewn to the world what the gospel really is; it has laid open the Holy Scriptures, and introduced a more accurate and judicious study, and a more perfect understanding of them: and in consequence, the great principles of our religion have not only been rationally explained, and fully vindicated; but a more enlarged view of the gospel dispensation, a more complete system of divine knowledge, has been given to the world, than ever it was blest with since the days of inspiration. And tho' the reformation may seem to have been now at a stand for near two centuries; tho' in a political view it has manifestly lost ground, and many considerable advantages have been gained against it; tho' among ourselves we frequently hear complaints, and probably not without cause, of the success of Popish emissaries, who compass sea and land to make proselytes: notwithstanding this, I think we may be assured, that upon the whole the reformation is every day acquiring new strength, and that its principles prevail in the world more and more. Learning, and knowledge of all kinds, and a spirit of inquiry, are still evidently increasing; and even in those countries where they are most discouraged, they are continually spreading themselves silently and secretly, in spite of all the vigilance of policy, and all the efforts of power: and where knowledge increases, it is a plain and infallible consequence, that Popery must diminish.

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This view of the state of christianity thro' the several ages down to our own times, short and very imperfect as it is, may however furnish sufficient occasion for observing, that the kingdom of God has never hitherto, in its most pure or most flourishing condition, seemed to make any near approach, or any effectual advances, towards that perfection and universality, to which it is decreed that it shall one day arrive. While it was in its most exalted state of purity, it laboured under oppression and persecution; when it flourished most in outward prosperity, and was strengthened in numbers and enlarged in extent, it proportionably decayed in its inward graces: and, even in its most enlarged extent; never possessed more than about a sixth part of the present known world. Whereas it is decreed, that “^p the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ; that all people, nations, and languages shall serve him; that the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in; and that all Israel shall turn unto the Lord and be saved.” The time is not yet come for the accomplishment of these predictions: neither can we rely upon the authority of some, who by a plausible interpretation of certain prophecies, confessedly very obscure, have presumed to determine the seasons, which God hath put in his own power, so far as to conclude, that it is near at hand. Yet we may be allowed to observe, that the present state of mankind, and the circumstances of the world in general, seem to indicate a preparation for this wonderful event, and a tendency towards this important period, however distant it may be. The great progress, which learning and useful knowledge of all sorts have made within these two last centuries, particularly in the cultivation of human reason, and the study of divine revelation; the prodigious advances, that have been made in navigation and commerce,

^p REV. xi. 15. DAN. vii. 14. ROM. xi. 25, 26.

vastly enlarging the bounds of the known habitable world; yet at the same time drawing nearer to one another the several nations, by opening a free and easy communication between the most distant; the great numbers of christian colonies, that have been sent into every part, and planted in the most remote corners of the earth: all these circumstances continually increasing and multiplying, and the daily improvements, which with unwearied diligence and with evident success are still pursued in all; tho' we see not the fruit as yet formed, nor so much as the blossom unfolded, yet seem to point out to us the seed-time and the spring, which is already preparing, and will in its due season bring forth a plenteous harvest. This particular sign of the times seems to be pointed out by the Angel to the prophet Daniel:

“^a But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”

But whatever be the secret determination of Almighty God with regard to the particular time destined for the completion of these gracious promises, it certainly behoves us to be always intent upon making the best advantage of every opportunity, that shall seem to offer itself, of promoting this great end; to keep it ever in view, and to pursue it by every method, that shall appear in the least conducive thereto. As we make it the daily subject of our prayers, so it ought to be the constant object of our most earnest endeavours. It is the duty of every christian, as the glory of God and the Salvation of mankind is highly concerned in it: it is more especially the duty of every minister of Christ, as the dispensation of the gospel is committed to him, and he is appointed to attend continually upon this very thing. I shall beg leave to mention one or two of the principal means, by

which the gospel of Christ may be best promoted, both among ourselves, and more at large in the world.

In the first place, we ought to promote and to encourage the advancement of religious knowledge, and the only means by which it can be advanced, freedom of inquiry.

Christianity itself was published to the world in the most enlightened age; it invited and challenged the examination of the ablest judges, and stood the test of the severest scrutiny: the more it is brought to the light, to the greater advantage will it appear. When on the other hand the dark ages of barbarism came on, as every art and science was almost extinguished, so was christianity in proportion oppressed and overwhelmed by error and superstition: and they that pretended to defend it from the assaults of its enemies, by prohibiting examination and free inquiry, took the surest method of cutting off all hopes of its recovery. Again, when letters revived, and reason regained her liberty; when a spirit of inquiry began to prevail, and was kept up and promoted by a happy invention, by which the communication of knowledge was wonderfully facilitated; christianity immediately emerged out of darkness, and was in a manner republished to the world in its native simplicity. It has always flourished or decayed together with learning and liberty: it will ever stand or fall with them. It is therefore of the utmost importance to the cause of true religion, that it be submitted to an open and impartial examination; that every disquisition concerning it be allowed its free course; that even the malice of its enemies should have its full scope, and try its utmost strength of argument against it. Let no man be alarmed at the attempts of atheists or infidels: let them produce their cause; let them bring forth their strong reasons, to their own confusion: afford them

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not the advantage of restraint, the only advantage which their cause admits of: let them not boast the false credit of supposed arguments and pretended demonstrations, which they are forced to suppress. What has been the consequence of all that licentious contradiction, with which the gospel has been received in these our times and in this nation? hath it not given birth to such irrefragable apologies and convincing illustrations of our most holy religion, as no other age or nation ever produced? What in particular has been the effect of unrestrained opposition in a very recent instance, prepared with much labour and study, and supported with all the art and eloquence of a late celebrated genius? hath not the very weakness and impotence of the assault given the most signal and decisive victory to the cause of truth? and do not the arms of this mighty champion of infidelity stand as a trophy erected by himself to display and to perpetuate the triumph? Let no one lightly entertain suspicions of any serious proposal for the advancement of religious knowledge; nor out of unreasonable prejudice endeavour to obstruct any inquiry, that professes to aim at the farther illustration of the great scheme of the Gospel in general, or the removal of error in any part, in faith, in doctrine, in practice, or in worship. An opinion is not therefore false, because it contradicts received notions: but whether true or false, let it be submitted to a fair examination; truth must in the end be a gainer by it, and appear with the greater evidence. Where freedom of inquiry is maintained and exercised under the direction of the sincere word of God, falsehood may perhaps triumph for a day, but to-morrow truth will certainly prevail, and every succeeding day will confirm her superiority.

The light, that arose upon the christian world at the reformation, hath still continued to increase, and we trust will “shine more and more unto the perfect day.” The labours of the learned have from that time,

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by the blessing of God upon the free exercise of reason and private judgment, been greatly successful in promoting religious knowledge, and particularly in laying open the hidden treasures of divine wisdom contained in the Holy Scriptures. Much hath been done in this important work; and much still remains to be done. Those heavenly stores are inexhaustible: every new acquisition still leads on to further discoveries, and the most careful search will still leave enough to invite and to reward the repeated searches of the pious and industrious to the latest ages. This is a work that demands our first and most earnest regard; the studies and assistance, the favour and encouragement of all. To confirm and illustrate these holy writings, to evince their truth, to shew their consistency, to explain their meaning, to make them more generally known and studied, more easily and perfectly understood by all; to remove the difficulties, that discourage the honest endeavours of the unlearned, and provoke the malicious cavils of the half-learned: this is the most worthy object, that can engage our attention; the most important end, to which our labours in the search of truth can be directed. And here I cannot but mention, what has often been represented, and I hope will not always be represented in vain; that nothing would more effectually conduce to this end, than the exhibiting the Holy Scriptures themselves to the people in a more advantageous and just light, by an accurate revival of our vulgar translation by public authority. It is now a century and a half since this translation was made; in which time a much greater progress has been made in the knowledge of the Scriptures, than in fifteen centuries preceding. Knowledge of all sorts hath since that time been greatly advanced, of which there is scarce any sort that has not some connection with the knowledge of scripture; in particular, and what is more immediately connected with it, the knowledge of the original languages, the Hebrew especially, and its several remaining dialects; the knowledge of antiquity, of civil history, of natural history,

tory, of genuine logic, of sound criticism. Many ancient monuments, both texts and versions^r of venerable authority, have been either newly discovered, or more openly communicated to the public, and set forth in the most advantageous and useful manner. And as we enjoy many assistances, which the learned of that age wanted; so likewise many impediments, which lay in their way, are now removed. The rubbish of false science is in a great measure cleared away; the obscure subtilty of scholastic theology is dispelled. The great prejudice of authority is in many instances happily diminished; the despotic power of antiquity is reduced within its proper limits. With regard to the Old Testament, the church of Christ is no longer a slave to the synagogue; nor does the christian interpreter blindly follow those blind guides the Jewish teachers. Their infallible Masora, boasted to have been an edifice raised by wise master-builders on the rock of divine authority, proves to have been framed by unskilful hands, and built on the sand: its foundations have long since been shaken, and it now totters to its fall. The defects of the Hebrew text itself, for it cannot be denied that it hath its defects, nor, as it hath been transmitted to us by human means, could it possibly be without defects; these have been pointed out, and remedies have in part been applied to them, and may be farther applied, by an accurate collation of ancient versions, and of various copies. The latter source is but newly opened,^s and the supplies that may be derived from it, if not very considerable in themselves, will yet be greatly important in their consequences. All this, (and more might be added to this,) shews evidently how much room

^r Samaritan Pentateuch, both text and version; Old Syriac version; Alexandrine MS.; Paris and London Polyglotts, &c.

^s See HOUBIGANT. Prolegom. in Biblia Hebraica, cap. III. art. 2. And, for more full satisfaction, "The State of the printed Hebrew Text of the Old Testament considered;" by the learned Mr. KENNICOTT: from whom farther light into this curious and important subject may shortly be expected.

there is for improvement ; it promises undoubted success to the undertaking, and warrants abundant advantages from it to our own immediately, and in consequence to the whole christian church.

Secondly, Let us make it our constant aim and study to restore, to maintain, and to promote true christian charity.

The church of Christ hath in almost every age suffered much less by all the rage and malice of its enemies, than by strife and faction within itself, and divisions among its own members. The worst consequence of some of the worst of heresies hath been discord, wrath, hatred, persecution : and in reality the most pernicious of all heresies hath been the maintaining and defending in such cases breach of charity itself as a duty. An unhappy persuasion has too generally prevailed, that church-communion demands unity of sentiment in the strictest sense ; and that all of the same profession should think just alike, not only as to a few plain fundamental articles, but as to many other particulars neither necessarily required, nor clearly revealed : the consequence of which is, that there must be almost as many sects in the world, as there are men. And this in effect hath for many ages most miserably distracted the church of Christ ; hath divided it against itself, and again subdivided every part of it into new factions and schisms : it hath been the cause of seditions, slaughters, massacres ; of the peculiar cruelties and barbarities, that are always the effects of false zeal, to the reproach of the christian name, and even to the disgrace of human nature. It is not to be wondered that christianity has made no greater progress ; while, instead of being exhibited to the world in its native beauty, as the most amiable religion that ever was, it has been exposed in such a horrible disguise, as the cause of the greatest mischiefs ; as the parent of strife, and confusion, and every evil work. But thanks be to God, we seem at present to have a better prospect before us : what-

ever other reasons we may have to complain of our own age, yet it must be allowed, that a spirit of true christian charity, and benevolence, and moderation, has of late prevailed among us beyond the example of former times. A more liberal and generous way of thinking and acting, with regard to those that differ from us, is every day gaining ground; and hath already had visible effects, in allaying former animosities and jealousies, and seems making way for reconciliation and unity. The different sects of Protestants seem to have lost much of that bitterness and distaste, which hath so long most unreasonably reigned between them, and to be every day drawing nearer to one another. Even those of the church of Rome, though they do not give it up, yet begin at least to be ashamed of their horrid principle of persecution; and, while they have no power or opportunity of acting to the contrary, can say, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." If this happy temper of meekness, forbearance and charity, should continue to increase, and should diffuse itself more widely through the christian church, one great offence will be removed, which hath ever hindered the progress of the Gospel: the gainsayer and unbeliever, when they shall observe the true spirit of christianity to prevail among christians, will be more easily induced to glorify God, and "to confess that God is in us of a truth." The prophet Isaiah seems to represent the increase of universal charity and religious knowledge in the christian church, as the preparation and prelude of the conversion of the Gentiles, and of the restoration of the Jews, in that remarkable prophecy, which certainly has not yet been fully accomplished: "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid:—they shall not hurt nor de-

* ISAIAH xi. 6, &c.

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“ stroy in all my holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the
 “ knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And “ it shall
 “ come to pass in that day, the root of Jesse, which standeth for an
 “ ensign to the people ; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his resting-
 “ place shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day,
 “ that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the
 “ remnant of his people, which shall be left : — and he shall set up
 “ an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the out-casts of Israel,
 “ and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of
 “ the earth.”

Lastly, and above all, Let us endeavour to recommend still more effectually our most holy religion by holiness and purity of life.

We live in an enlightened age, in which knowledge is still increasing ;
 in which continual approaches are made towards a more perfect com-
 prehension of the Gospel scheme in its full extent ; in which new acces-
 sions of light are every day thrown on the Holy Scriptures : the true
 christian spirit of charity, moderation, and forbearance prevails more
 and more, lessening by degrees our mutual distastes, and healing our
 divisions. May we not hope, that these improvements will have their
 proper and natural effect, though we do not yet perceive it, in intro-
 ducing a reformation of another nature, and infusing more and more of
 the true spirit of our religion into our manners and our lives.² Greater

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שְׂרֵשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל עֹמֵד וְנוֹ Our translation, by departing from
 the Masoretical pointing, and the obvious grammatical construction, hath obscured this
 passage. The frequent necessity we are under of appealing from it to the original suf-
 ficiently shews the expediency of the revival above proposed : and I beg leave here to
 add, that the present time offers a favourable opportunity, which ought not to be ne-
 glected ; when the station, to which the chief direction of such a work properly belongs,
 is filled with a Person endowed, beyond any other of this age, with all the abilities and
 qualifications requisite for the bringing it to that degree of perfection, of which it is at
 present capable.

knowledge should reasonably be attended with more perfect obedience; and the love of our brethren is closely connected with the love of God. How bad soever therefore in this respect the present appearance of things may be, let us not be discouraged in our endeavours to promote the practice of true religion. And it is indeed more in our power to promote it, than we are generally apt to think. Every one according to his station may have his proper share in it: some by their skill and abilities, others by their influence and authority; some by their exhortations, all by their example. More especially is it the duty and peculiar province of the ministers of the gospel, as workers together with Christ, to pursue it by every method; "by pureness, by knowledge, by long suffering, by kindness, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God." As many of us therefore as have received this ministry, or have it by any means in our power to contribute to this great work, let us not faint, neither let us be wearied in it; still looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, when every man shall have his due praise of God, and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour: when they that make others wise unto salvation, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.

F I N I S.

